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OUR OUTLYING PROVINCE.

IT is not an easy task to give an idea of Alaska, as a whole, which can be comprehended. The extent of territory, which comprises more than five hundred and fifty million square miles, the great variety of climate which exists and must exist over so many myriads of miles of shore, river, and forest, of lake, morass, and Arctic plain, are but two of the many bewildering factors which make the problem of description so difficult. There is no lack of Alaskan literature. Adventurous discoverers and persistent traders have skirted the coasts, ascended and descended the great rivers, and given us their information as to the present, as well as their conjectures as to the future. None of their descriptions, as a whole, is very cheerful and few of them very hopeful.

Everywhere in the reports of the last census are seen the rude products of barbarian life and the hand-to-mouth existence of races struggling with cold and content with bare subsistence. But a generation which has witnessed the disappearance of a great American desert visible to many able men ; which has seen the desolate sage brush succeeded by rich crops, and the dreary cactus plain laden with the luxuriant verdure of the great potato and alfalfa fields of Colorado, may well hope that the energy and vigor which will before long be turned upon Alaska, will make some other generation smile at the dismal reports of to-day, strictly truthful though they may be.

Ivan Petroff, the Russian Agent of the Census Bureau of 1880, divides the province into six parts, and at present, at least, this partition is a natural one. All the country north of the valley drained by the Yukon makes up the first division. It lies for the most part beyond the Arctic Circle and has, perhaps, three thousand Esquimau inhabitants, one to every forty square miles of snow and ice. No white man has ever crossed this country from the valley of the Yukon to the Arctic Sea. Coal in easily

accessible seams is found near Cape Lisburne, but it is of no present value. The same may be said of this entire region, and it is even a question if the present inhabitants can long survive the rapid disappearance of the walrus and the whale.

The Great Valley of the Yukon makes the second division. In a hundred villages, half of them on the river banks and a fifth on the Delta, live 6,870 people, one to every twenty-six miles, with no saving leaven of civilization except nineteen whites and eighteen half-breeds. Though many books have been written and more articles published on the river Yukon, probably the great majority of the American people has yet to be astonished by the fact that Mr. Seward bought a larger river than any we owned before. The Yukon, flowing through the centre of our new province, seven miles wide, ten hundred miles from its mouth, and as many from its source, pours into the Behring Sea a volume of water one-third more vast than the Mississippi empties into the Gulf of Mexico. But, thus far, its great expanse has shown but little of value to the permanent settler. It can only be classed among the productive forces of the country in the same confusion of thought that enabled an enthusiastic admirer of the Province to end his catalogue of its resources with "sixty volcanoes, of which twenty are in a state of active eruption." It owes its vast volume of water to the mossy morasses which lie along its edges, holding moisture like a sponge, and preventing its dissipation by evaporation. Along its margins are banks which are eaten away, like those of the Mississippi, falling in huge masses into the mighty channel. It is a pleasing anticipation to think of its figuring some day in the River and Harbor Bill, like the Mississippi and Missouri, with huge appropriations to improve navigation, with "incidental" protection to the plantation owners.

South of the eastern portion of the Yukon Valley is the Kuskokvim Division, lying, a huge wedge, between the ranges of mountains which bound it and including the Kuskokvim, the Togiac, and Nucheyac rivers. The lower part, however, of the Kuskokvim, having pierced the barrier, lies beyond the mountains towards the Yukon Delta. This region supports a population of nearly nine thousand, with thirteen square miles for each one. Of white men there are three.

To the southeast is the Kadiac Division, with its long coast, stretching from the Shumaqin Islands to Mount Saint Elias.

This division includes the Kadiac Island, and is nearer civilization than any yet mentioned. Of the population, 4,352 in number, one to every sixteen square miles, nearly a thousand are whites and half-breeds. The houses are better built and many of them are of timber, entirely above ground. Over the greater part of Alaska, the dwellings are so far underground as to be entered by a tunnel on the hands and knees. The mouth of the tunnel, at a considerable distance from the main apartment, is covered with a rude shed as a protection from the snow and the severity of the climate. The houses are conical, covered with turf, with a hole for the escape of the smoke from the fire in the centre, around which are ranged the platforms of timber or sod for the sleeping and living regions.

To the westward of the two divisions reaches out toward Asia the long line of mountain tops which carry the Alaska range far out to sea. Upon these treeless islands, with a climate of which the record for seven years gave fifty-three clear days and twelve hundred and thirty of rain and snow and hail, a population of 2,451, one to every six square miles, in the sea fisheries and in the pursuit of the fox and the sea otter win the largest incomes of any of the natives of Alaska. This enumeration includes 82 white men, 479 half-breeds, and the 290 inhabitants of the Pribylof group.

The Pribylof group are the islands in Behring Sea which are breeding grounds for the fur seal. From two islands of this group, St. Paul and St. George, the one containing thirty-three square miles and the other twenty-seven, comes all the direct revenue derived by the United States from its purchase of \$7,200,000, and that revenue, over \$300,000, is large enough to pay a fair interest on the sum invested. To these little resting places, in the heart of Behring Sea, come every year more than 4,700,000 seals. For three months the rookeries along the shores are multitudinous with amphibian life, the like of which can be seen nowhere else on the round earth. Years ago the San Juan and Juan Fernandez Islands, off the coast of Chili and Bolivia, the coasts of Patagonia and Terra del Fuego, and the Falkland Islands, swarmed with uncounted and uncountable millions of fur seal, and might be to-day the finest seal rookeries on the globe. But the unrestrained, senseless hunting of the seal by every one who could hire a vessel and crew has resulted in a near approach to extermination in the Southern seas, and to-day the frequent

capture of vessels in Arctic waters, laden with thousands of skins, which must be of the very least possible value as furs, shows the need of vigorous measures to preserve to the world one of its finest articles of luxury, elegance, and comfort. The climate of St. Paul and St. George, cool and humid, covering the islands with fog and shifting mist, the position and nature of the shores, free from sand and mud, make them the ideal country for an animal which needs the land only as a place for breeding, much broken in its nature, and as a nurture ground for its young. Every year, about the first of May, begin to appear the great bull seals, at least six years old and seven feet long, dragging clumsily out of the water upon the rocky foundations which constitute the breeding grounds their great weight of 400 to 600 pounds. The nearer the shore the more eligible is the situation and the higher the price, measured by the fighting needful to maintain it. Each one keeps his place until a stronger takes it away. Severe and terrible wounds and often death result from these contests. When the females arrive a month afterwards, a carnival of combat is the result of this culmination of nerve tension. After many struggles and much confusion each one has provided himself with a family varying from five to forty, and a period of two months of uninterrupted domesticity sets in. About the middle of August the season is over and the males gradually depart, not the full rounded creatures that came, plump with blubber and well-filled muscle, but poor and scraggy. During the whole period of three months, if we are to believe unanimous testimony, they never leave the grounds and have had neither food nor drink. As has been already said, the males of six years old and over are on the breeding grounds. Against the approach of any others the grounds are guarded with Turkish seclusion, vigor, and barbarity. The least intrusion by a younger male means mutilation and perhaps death, prompt and immediate. These young males, "called bachelors," roam about the regions near by and furnish the skins which come to market. A hundred thousand of these young seals are yearly driven to the killing grounds, knocked on the head with clubs and are stripped of their coverings. Great care has to be taken to get the skin removed while the animal is in proper condition or the fur is spoiled. If heated by the drive he must have time to become cool. The skins are salted and in due time shipped to London,

where they are cured and rendered fit for use. The hundred thousand killed under six years of age is probably not much over one-half the number which might be killed with entire safety to the perpetuation of the race. The female seal brings forth her young very soon after landing in June. The little seals have to learn the art of swimming for themselves.

The remaining division of Alaska is Sitkan Division, which is becoming so well known to tourists. It has a population of more than 7,000 Indians. There were 523 whites and half-breeds in 1880, but there must be more than four times that number now. This is beyond question the best part of Alaska in climate, soil, mineral wealth, and in inhabitants. The Indians are willing to work, are capable of sustained labor, and appreciate regular wages. The early history of the country shows them to have been as brave and warlike as the tribes on which so much poetry and rhetoric have been bestowed, and they have, to modern prosaic eyes, the additional charm of an earlier possibility of civilization. Some of our surplus revenue might well be spent on their education and development. The delights of the voyage to Sitka have become known to many, and the journey is destined to take the place of many a foreign trip. Whoever seeks the highest charm of wild and wonderful scenery, will turn from Switzerland and Norway to the charms of the Alexander Archipelago, and to the frozen rivers which cover the seaside valleys of Alaska. On board a comfortable steamer, without the worry of change, with no chances of bad hotels, in serene pleasure, the traveler voyages two thousand miles as if in a narrow inland sea, forever changing, and always wild, startling, and unexpected. You seem to be passing, and, indeed, you are passing through mountain valleys, with the mountain peaks almost within touch on either hand. Where there are low hills wooded to the summits and sloping to the water's edge, the tall peaks behind show their snow-capped heads shrouded in endless variety of shifting cloud and moving mist. Where the mountain hangs almost precipitous over the channel streams of water fed by the exhaustless snows pour down visible here and there through the breaks in the forests, sometimes in great torrents with broad avalanches of foam and the roar of angry waters, and sometimes in slender threads so steady and fine that it needs the tremor of a gusty wind to assure you

that they are not motionless streaks of color on the rock. Who-ever has seen an Alaska glacier has felt to the full that sense of awe which comes of being in the visible presence of one of the great forces of nature. The glaciers of Switzerland melt in the noonday sun high up on the mountain side, while the glaciers of Alaska march in unbroken column majestic to the sea, fac-ing the bay with an icy cliff reaching hundreds of feet into the air and stretching for miles from shore to shore. When in the sombre twilight of an Alaskan midsummer midnight you look across the gray distance under a clouded sky, unbroken by sun or moon or star, at two great rivers of ice, meeting at the base of the mountain which lies like a black island between, and speeding massive and wide to the water's edges, and think of the centuries which have seen that vast mass, motionless to every human eye, move with ceaseless progress from the cold snows above to the cold waters below, helping to make a world, you will have some conception of the weary years the world has seen and the weary years the world is yet to see. At the Yellowstone Park and in Alaska you can see some of the ways in which the world was made and is still mak-ing.

Sitkan Alaska will have at least two beautiful villages, one to be and the other already beautiful. As the steamer approaches Juneau, on the Gastineaux Channel, there comes into view a most striking picture. The new town spreads its little cottages over a low hillock, at what seems the base of a broad perpendicular height, covered with evergreen trees, and stretching away into the sky overhead. Down the beetling cliff play slender cascades of waving water, which brighten and vivify the whole mountain side. On the hillock the streets are incipient, rich with mud, and sloppy with the daily rainfall; but sidewalks are beginning to emerge from chaos, and one can see in the near future a well-or-dered and decent town.

Sitka, the old vice regal seat, is already a beautiful spot. One may travel far and never see a nobler or more varied picture than spreads before his eye who stands on the roof of the old Russian "Castle" on the summit of a high knoll at the water's edge. It was not a bright day, but from the north to the east and away round to the south was a half circle of mighty hills, snow-capped and mist-crowned. Away off at sea, melting into indistinctness in the haze of the distance, were the great mountains which

cover the quarter of the compass from north to west. At our feet on the seaward side was the harbor, dotted with scores of beautiful islands and islets bright with vivid green, and in the farthest distance was a glimpse of the edge of the great ocean itself. At the base of the "Castle" the two wings of the town spread out at right angles with each other. The Indian village lies on the shore to the north, parallel with the low bluffs where are the graves of the dead, and the quaint little huts which mark their last resting places. Near by the weather stained block houses bring back the lonesome memories of the conflicts with the savages in the earlier days. The white village lies on the other shore, strongly marked to the eye by the Greek Church, with its green roofs. Beyond the village the Indian River, gathering itself from the snows of the mountain, flows over a rocky bed through a grove charming with its sauntering places and in July rich with a vegetation which seems little short of tropical in its luxuriance.

Wrangel is the place to visit if you wish to see the Indian village uncontaminated by civilization. The houses are of a higher order than those of continental Alaska. They are like our log houses, only broader and without any pretence of separate apartments. In the centre of the roof is a square hole covered with a four-posted frame, on which the covering can be shifted to suit the varying winds. Under this hole is the place for the fire, around which the natives sit on their haunches when they crave food or warmth. Over the fire are strung the fish and flesh which they smoke for future use. Around the sides is a raised platform, on which the natives live, and sleep, and work. The entrance door is in the gable end. The whole establishment is not nice or clean. On the contrary, it is nasty and unclean; and when the ladies of the mansion black their faces to preserve their complexions they seem to gild the refined gold of the situation, like the painted lilies which they are. When old age and the wrinkles of a life of hardship are supplemented and adorned by black stain on the face, a yellow bone protruding from below the under lip, and mellowed by general and unmitigated uncleanness, feminine fascination appears to be reduced to its lowest terms. There at Wrangel are totem poles, ugly, curved monuments, erected either to indicate that the owner, like the Duke of Marlboro', moved in the best society on account of the virtues of his ancestors, or to frighten away the evil beings which inhabited

the Alaskan air. Some are much inclined to the latter belief, having in mind how great an incentive to architecture the fear of the devil has been in other lands. At Sitka the native dwellings are larger, cleaner, and show the results of better police regulations.

The climate of Alaska, as might be expected from its continental expanse, varies greatly. The cold on the Arctic shore must be almost unendurable. The Yukon River is not open to navigation until July, and closes at the end of September, and in many places, in the mossy morasses, the ice lies all the year round a few inches under the surface, protected by the moss from the heat of the sun. Bishop Leghus and Father Mondard, two Catholic missionaries, who spent a year in this region, were delighted with the summer heat on the Yukon River and in its "fertile valley;" but the census agent of 1880, Ivan Petroff, thinks the good men much too enthusiastic, and gives altogether a more dismal account of the country than was ever given of Dakota by its early official visitors. In the Sitkan Division the unexpected happens. In this country, between fifty-five degrees and sixty degrees of Northern latitude, the thermometer in fifty years has never been under four degrees below zero, and never but once has gone to eighty-seven degrees above. The mean of all these years was forty-three degrees twenty-eight minutes. This year the first snow did not fall at Sitka until January 16th. The summer, however, is not warm, though the natives hardly seemed to think it inclement. Our party at Wrangel saw a sick man lying on his blanket out under the open heavens, and as we were picking our way through the inexpressible mud and ooze and nastiness, we saw a dreadful looking creature, with a blackened tin pot in one hand, while under the other arm, pressed against her body, was a baby with nothing on but a shirt. As she hitched along the little child became more exposed, until you could see it naked below the arm pits. When she reached her smouldering fire, which was out of doors, she coolly sat down on her haunches, smoothed flat a bunch of the wet grass, seated the baby thereon, and the little thing blinked and snuggled contented by its mother's side with all the satisfaction which was ever born of good treatment and maternal tenderness, while we effeminate grown men and women looked on clad in rain coats, winter ulsters, and the thickest woolens money could buy.

Of the native population but little can be here said, though very much is known. There are 17,617 Eskimo Inuits, 2,147 Aleuts, and 11,478 Indians. Of all of them it can be said that they exhibit qualities which make them of superior promise to the Indians with whom we are familiar. If there were no other evidence the yearly importation of 10,000 barrels of flour, 6,000 cases of hard bread, 1,200 chests of tea, 2,500 barrels of sugar, and between 15,000 and 20,000 pounds of tobacco, with, perhaps, an equal value of dry goods, show that they have civilized wants and desires which promise to be a great incentive to their further improvement. The willingness to work manifested at least by those of the Sitkan Division is of the happiest augury.

What is to be said of the resources of our outlying province ? The word resources, like all other words of large import, is a term of varied meaning. If you intend by the word the products which can now be of use to the world, they are few in number but of vast extent. They are furs and fish and minerals. The pursuit of the seal and sea otter on the streams and on the sea, and the hunting of the fur-bearing land animals, already constitute great industries. Six thousand sea otter skins are taken annually on the Southern coast, and the beaver extends throughout the vast interior, and the fur trade is more than doubled since our occupation.

The salmon on the Yukon, the Kuskokvim, and other rivers are so numerous that, with reasonable restriction, one-fourth would support the natives and the rest might be sold to the world. The deep sea fisheries of cod and halibut have been sufficiently explored already to make it certain that they will far exceed, both in quantity and in ease of access, those fisheries on the Atlantic coast which have been the subject of so much solicitude and have demanded so many conventions and treaties. The mineral output has but begun, and yet the greatest stamp mill for pounding gold out of rock in the United States, and, therefore, in the world, is on a lonely island in the Alexander Archipelago. Large, however, as it is, numbering one hundred and twenty stamps, and thundering like Niagara, the owners propose to double its size, and have already begun the work. The rock they mill lies in a broad vein, nearly, if not quite, three hundred feet in width. There is very little gold to the ton, but there are very many tons, and the process of extraction is not costly. It is thought that

the vein stretches for miles the whole length of the Douglas Island. The snows of the mountain furnish the power, although steam power is also at hand, in case of drouth. The mine is named for Mr. Treadwell, the superintendent, who made many tests and spent much time before entering upon the great enterprise which seems to be crowned with so signal a success. Coal has been found in several places, but thus far no commercial advantage has been derived from the discoveries. The forests will afford a great future resource, but not until the Pacific slope has a greater population, and until the timber of Oregon and Washington has been much diminished. The Alaska cedar is a beautiful wood, capable of polish, and giving out a pleasant odor. There is, however, but little of it in comparison with the vast extent of the spruce, which is found throughout half of the country. How thick the forests are, and what quantities of timber there may be, can only be told after much closer exploration than has thus far ever been possible. In the southern part the trees are large and the product comparatively good, but all the spruce is very resinous and unfitted for nice finishing work.

If it should be asked what the future of Alaska seems likely to be, I can give no answer. Prophecy is very easy, but it is also very cheap. I cannot refrain, however, from saying, though it is the result of what I have seen and read rather than of what I have written, that the prospect of the conquest of Alaska does not seem a tithe as difficult or half as hopeless as the conquest of the land now covered by the prosperous population of the United States must have seemed to the emigrants who first strayed across the ocean and dotted the shores of the Atlantic coast.

THOMAS B. REED.